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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide packet is designed to be used with the television documentary "Fooling with Words" hosted by Bill Moyers featuring the 1998 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, during which thousands of people gathered for four days to listen to, read, discuss, and celebrate contemporary poetry. The packet can be used in arts and social studies classes as well as in English and literature classes. Featured poets represent different cultural perspectives, determined in part by differences in gender, age, and ethnic background. Included in the packet are "poet cards" (featuring poems, poets' statements, biographical notes, photographs, discussion questions, and suggested activities), time grid, selected bibliography, and a guide to building a core high school poetry collection. It is recommended that teachers use the packet's materials in the following ways: preview the programs and read each poem carefully before making class assignments (there may be sensitive and/or disturbing subjects); decide which segment and/or specific poems to offer to the class, and use the time code on the folder to identify and cue each segment; become familiar with all "poet cards"; use quoted statements by each poet to spark discussion about the poet's perspective on poetry and/or about poetry in general; use the single, introductory question for each poet to help students enter a poem by reminding them that poetry connects directly to their lives; stimulate imaginative experimentation and cross-fertilization by modifying, adapting, and re-applying "poet card" activities to students' capacities; consider the relationship of printed text to actual performance; and consult the "Fooling with Words" World Wide Web site for additional poems and expanded statements about poetry. (NKA)

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ED 432 772

FOOLING WITH WORDS

WITH BILL MOYERS

THE 1998 GERALDINE R. DODGE POETRY FESTIVAL

TEACHER'S GUID

CS216 819

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THE GERALDINE R. DODGE POETRY FESTIVAL

The Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival is the largest poetry event in North America. The Festival, held every other year, was inaugurated in 1986 by the Dodge Foundation to help poetry assume its rightful place in the center of our imaginative and emotional lives.

Situated in historic Waterloo Village in Northern New Jersey, the Festival offers four days of poetry readings and poetry-centered events—discussions, conversations, and workshops—for students, teachers, and the general public.

For more information, visit the Festival Web site at www.grdodge.org/poetry/, fax (973) 540-1211, call (973) 540-8443 ext.139, or write to Poetry Festival, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, 163 Madison Avenue, P.O. Box 1239, Morristown, NJ 07962-1239.

2000 Festival—September 21, 22, 23 & 24

Dear Educator:

This is about something I think you will enjoy personally and find helpful in your work with students.

Fooling with Words is a PBS documentary special produced with young people in mind. We wanted them to see just how vital, compelling, and enjoyable poetry can be. So we took our cameras to the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival in Waterloo, New Jersey, to capture the excitement of "the Woodstock of Poetry." We covered the festival as if it were a sporting event, with cameras everywhere—on the poets as they performed; the audience as it watched, laughed, wept, and cheered; workshops where students and aspiring bards talked face-to-face with the poets about their craft and their lives.

The result is a film that will introduce your students to the power and pleasure of poetry in many guises—from the rhythmic cadences of Amira Baraka and Kurtis Lamkin (who accompanies his poems on the kora, the African ancestor of the harp) to the haunting evocations of Lorna Dee Cervantes and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, the puckish wit of Paul Muldoon, the spiritual power of Jane Hirshfield, the wry commentary by Deborah Garrison on the life of women in the workplace and the moving remembrances of "Halley's Comet" by Stanley Kunitz, at 95 the dean of American poets.

This smorgasbord of contemporary American poetry comes at a timely moment. *The New York Times* says poetry is enjoying a resurgence in America. *The Atlantic Monthly* says, "the nation's hot romance with poetry shows no sign of cooling off." *Esquire* predicts poetry will be the pop-culture event at the opening of the new millennium. Volkswagen included poetry books as a "standard feature" in all its new cars during National Poetry Month, and poetry is being celebrated at events from the recent White House gathering of poets to poetry slams in smoky downtown bars.

Fooling with Words captures the spirit of this phenomenon. We hope you will tape the program and use the accompanying materials.

Sincerely,

Bill Moyers

"We have fallen into the place where everything is music. That's what the Festival feels like—we feel this vast interconnectedness. It's amazing that this many people can be really genuinely excited about fooling with words."

—Coleman Barks

"One thing I love about the Festival is seeing the thousands of high school kids trooping in, so excited about the possibility of other ways to live, about the choice that poets make to do something difficult, unlikely, a little bit out of the cultural mainstream."

—Mark Doty

"The great feature of the Festival is its generosity of spirit, its welcome to different factions in poetry, different schools of poetry, young and old. That demonstration of the democratic spirit is indicative of one of the most important revolutions in the whole history of modern poetry in this country."

—Stanley Kunitz

"The beautiful thing about being at the Festival is that it's like a carnival, and you're the ride. You can be a roller coaster, or whatever."

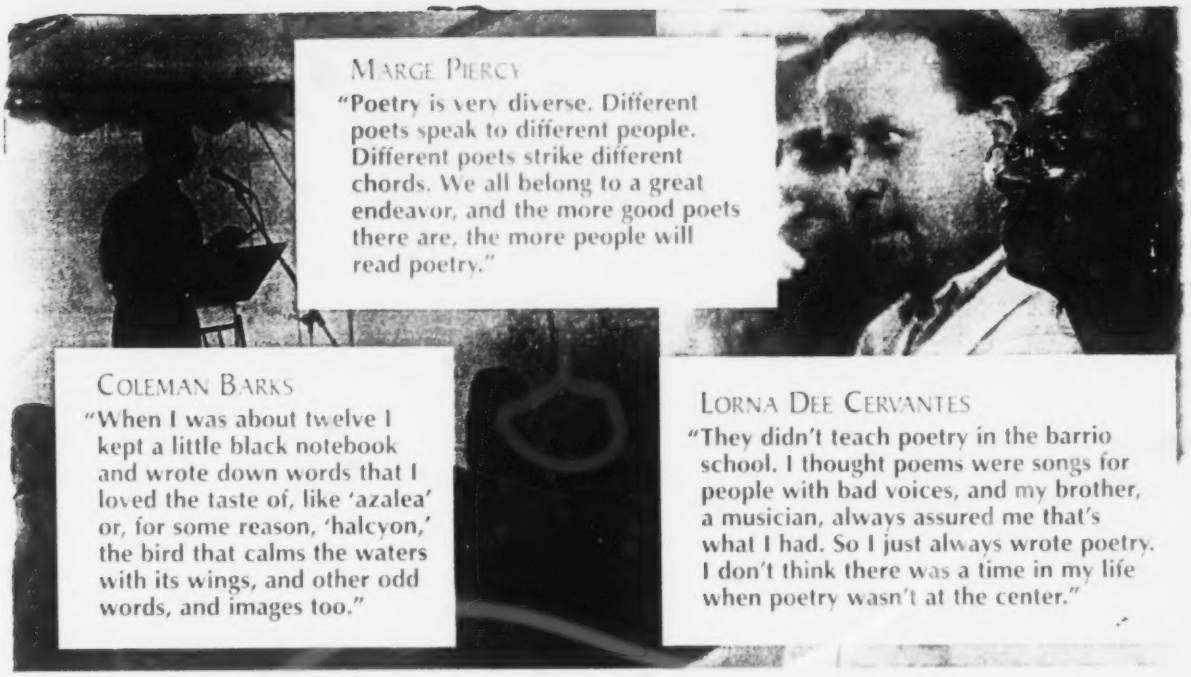
—Kurtis Lamkin

SOUNDS OF POETRY—nine half hours of poems by and interviews with many of the poets featured in FOOLING WITH WORDS—will be available from PBS stations after the September 1999 broadcast of the two-hour special. Please check with your local public television station for the availability and schedule of these programs. These are the poets included:

Amiri Baraka
Robert Pinsky
Marge Piercy
Coleman Barks
Lorna Dee Cervantes and Shirley Geok-lin Lim
Stanley Kunitz
Jane Hirshfield
Lucille Clifton and Mark Doty
Deborah Garrison

SOUNDS OF POETRY may be ordered from Films for the Humanities and Sciences; ordering information inside.

A list of the poems in SOUNDS OF POETRY can be found on the FOOLING WITH WORDS Web site: www.wnet.org/foolingwithwords or www.pbs.org/foolingwithwords



MARGE PIERCY

"Poetry is very diverse. Different poets speak to different people. Different poets strike different chords. We all belong to a great endeavor, and the more good poets there are, the more people will read poetry."

COLEMAN BARKS

"When I was about twelve I kept a little black notebook and wrote down words that I loved the taste of, like 'azalea' or, for some reason, 'halcyon,' the bird that calms the waters with its wings, and other odd words, and images too."

LORNA DEE CERVANTES

"They didn't teach poetry in the barrio school. I thought poems were songs for people with bad voices, and my brother, a musician, always assured me that's what I had. So I just always wrote poetry. I don't think there was a time in my life when poetry wasn't at the center."

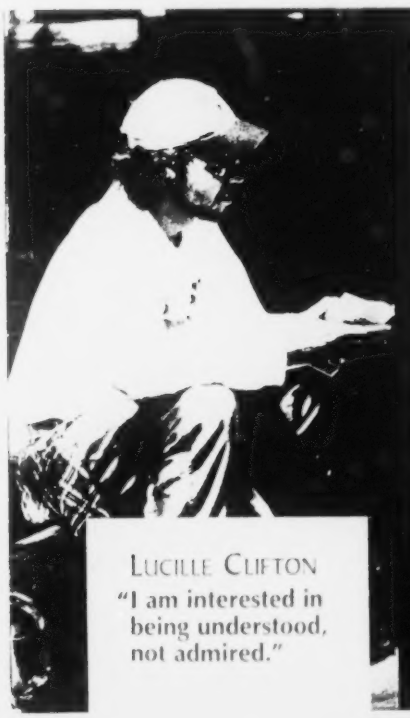
MARK DOTY

"The act of making a poem implies that somebody's listening. So we're reaching toward, imaginatively, another consciousness, another listener."

Remarks About Being a Poet and About Poetry

JANE HIRSHFIELD

"Poetry was the field in which I developed the self I became. . . We write in order to find out w and what we are."



AMIRI BARAKA

"You think your stuff is good? See those guys digging a hole in the street there? When they get a minute off to eat a sandwich, go read them a poem. See if you get hit on the head. If you don't get hit on the head, you've got a future."

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

"If a poem does not move or g pleasure, then I don't think it really succeeds as art. Isn't it important for us to get pleasu in some way, even in the deep pain and grief, to survive? Maybe pleasure is the oar tha we need not to drown."

LUCILLE CLIFTON

"I am interested in being understood, not admired."

Funding for this guide is provided by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

THIRTEEN·WNET
450 West 33rd Street
New York, NY 10001

INTRODUCTION

Since 1986, the restored nineteenth-century village of Waterloo, New Jersey, has hosted the largest poetry gathering in North America—the biennial Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. For four days, thousands of people gather to listen to, read, discuss, and celebrate poetry.

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS captures the excitement of the 1998 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. It features performances by and interviews with some of the most accomplished poets of our time.

BROADCAST: **September 26, 1999 on PBS** (check local listings)

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Preview the programs and read each poem carefully before making class assignments, as some poets may deal with potentially sensitive and/or disturbing subjects.

Decide which segments and/or specific poems to offer to your class, and use the time code on the folder to identify and cue up each segment. Remember: You can tape programs from FOOLING WITH WORDS or SOUNDS OF POETRY and use them in the classroom for one year after each broadcast.

Familiarize yourself with all Poet Cards, noting that some poets are presented on two sides of a Poet Card, others only on a single side. Designed for photocopying, these cards offer poems and a range of other resources for each poet represented: a photograph, a bio note, a statement relating to poetry or being a poet, an introductory question, several questions designed to stimulate discussion, and suggested follow-up activities.

Use quoted statements by each poet to spark discussion about this poet's perspective on poetry and/or about poetry in general. Much can be gained by choosing and comparing favorites, by discussing how each statement relates to that poet's poems, by discussing how a statement by one poet relates to the poems of another poet, or by assembling these statements into a collage.

Use the single, introductory question for each poet to help students enter a poem by reminding them that poetry connects directly to their own lives. For example, start the discussion of a poet by asking students to determine which poem the large-print, introductory question addresses. Follow the question as it goes into that poem and back out into life. Encourage ongoing reflection by asking students to make up their own introductory questions.

Stimulate imaginative experimentation and cross-fertilization by modifying, adapting, and re-applying Poet Card activities as your inclinations and your students' capacities suggest.

Consider the relationship of printed text to actual performance, including on-the-spot improvisation—as with Amiri Baraka, Coleman Barks, and Kurtis Lamkin.

Consult *FOOLING WITH WORDS Online* for additional poems, expanded statements about poetry, and a wide range of other program-related resources.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS:

1) Enlarge statements by poets on the Poet Cards and post them around your classroom.

2) Let students choose poems to read aloud, then review how the poets actually perform these poems on the video.

3) Distribute copies of selected Poet Cards to small groups of students, and ask each group to define linkages among the poets and the poems.

4) Provide students with copies of the complete set of Poet Cards and ask them to organize their own anthologies, according to their own principles.

A Note on Interdisciplinary Use

This *FOOLING WITH WORDS Teacher's Guide* can be used in classes in the arts and social studies as well as in English and literature classes. The poets in FOOLING WITH WORDS and THE SOUNDS OF POETRY represent different cultural perspectives, determined in part by differences in gender, age, and ethnic background. Their voices can spark interest in events, places, or historical periods and bring a human scale to large, abstract concepts. In addition to sharing these materials with colleagues teaching other subjects, many teachers regularly invite students to choose poets and poems relevant to their other courses of study.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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Building a Core High School Poetry Collection

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BASIC

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If you'd like to be included on a mailing list to receive information about future Poetry Festivals, please check the box below. And, if you're interested, we'd be happy to send you another FREE teacher's guide—to POETRY HEAVEN, featuring the 1996 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival—while supplies last.

The 1998 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival was funded, organized, and produced by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

GERALDINE R. DODGE FOUNDATION
163 Madison Avenue
P.O. Box 1239
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FOOLING WITH WORDS
WITH BILL MOYERS

POET CARDS

Amiri Baraka
Coleman Barks
Lorna Dee Cervantes (one side)
Lucille Clifton
Mark Doty
Deborah Garrison (one side)
Jane Hirshfield (one side)
Stanley Kunitz
Kurtis Lamkin
Shirley Geok-lin Lim
Paul Muldoon (one side)
Sharon Olds (one side)
Marge Piercy
Robert Pinsky
Poem Subjects and Themes (one side)

LOG ON

FOOLING WITH WORDS Online at www.wnet.org/foolingwithwords or www.pbs.org/foolingwithwords provides a downloadable version of this teacher's guide plus a wide range of additional related resources—a Web-based lesson plan, a series of teaching strategies, additional poems by the poets appearing in FOOLING WITH WORDS and SOUNDS OF POETRY, and a library of video clips of the poets reading and discussing poetry. An online discussion forum will allow teachers to talk about issues of interest and concern. A special survey section will allow teachers to give feedback on the educational materials and on the program. Of course, the site will include a resource section, with information about materials available in book form, on audio and videotape, and on the Web.

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ORDERING INFORMATION

The companion book to the series, FOOLING WITH WORDS with Bill Moyers, published by William Morrow and Company, is available for $20 wherever books are sold. Videocassettes of FOOLING WITH WORDS, the two-hour special, and SOUNDS OF POETRY, the nine half-hour programs, will be available through Films for the Humanities and Sciences by calling 1-800-257-5126 or by visiting their website: www.films.com

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A Time Grid for the poems from SOUNDS OF POETRY can be found on *FOOLING WITH WORDS Online*, www.wnet.org/foolingwithwords

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Amiri Baraka

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"I believe you have to be true to people. You have to be writing something that people understand but, at the same time, something that's profound enough to have meaning past, say, the six o'clock news."

Born in 1934 in Newark, New Jersey, Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones) has international stature as a poet, dramatist, essayist, and political activist. Associated with the Beats in the 1950s, he became a leader in the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s. Much of his work considers the political situation of people of color in capitalist America.

PHOTO: DON HUNSTEIN

Wise I

WHY's (Nobody Knows
The Trouble I Seen)
Trad.

If you ever find
yourself, some where
lost and surrounded
by enemies
who won't let you
speak in your own language
who destroy your statues
& instruments, who ban
your oom boom ba boom
then you are in trouble
deep trouble
they ban your
oom boom ba boom
you in deep deep
trouble

humph!

probably take you several hundred years
to get
out!

Monday in B Flat

I can pray
all day
& God
wont come.

But if I call
911
The Devil
Be here

in a minute!

Who would ban your "oom boom ba boom"? Why?

Baraka's Poetry Reading as Jazz Performance

Like a jazz musician, Amiri Baraka generally begins with a set text but allows himself liberty to improvise freely in response to the moment and his immediate context. In addition to deleting from and adding to his printed text, even dropping or repeating whole stanzas, he also sometimes performs long passages which have no direct print analogues. While his allegiance is always to the live poem happening now, he bases that living poem on dedicated practice and preparation.

"Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)" includes excerpts from published poems and improvised material. A complete transcript showing these distinctions appears on *FOOLING WITH WORDS Online*.

Amiri Baraka

from *Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)*

The chains
& dark
dark &
dark, if there was "light"
it meant
Ghoosts

Rotting family we
ghost ate
three

A people flattened & chained &
bathed & degraded
in their own hysterical waste

below
beneath
under neath
deep down
up under

grave cave pit
lower & deeper

weeping miles below
skyscraper gutters

Blue blood hole into which blueness
is the terror, massacre, torture
& original western
holocaust

Slavery

We were slaves

Slaves

Slaves

...

We were

Slaves

...

They threw
our lives
a way

Beneath the violent philosophy
of primitive
cannibals

Primitive
Violent
Steam driven
Cannibals*

...

It's my brother, my sister.
At the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean there's a railroad made of human bones.
Black ivory
Black ivory

...

Think of Slavery
as
Educational!**

*from "So The King Sold the Farmer #39" **from "Y The Link Will Not Always Be "Missing"#40"

QUESTIONS

1. Although "Wise I" directly addresses the history of African Americans, its language remains open to broader application. What else could it address?
2. If we "Think of Slavery / as / Educational," what can slavery teach us?
3. How do these three poems reflect or comment upon one another? How is each unique?

ACTIVITIES

1. Consider what happens when Baraka repeats, with subtle variations, the word "slave." Try to do something similar with a word that carries strong feeling for you.
2. Develop a chant of your own, using percussive rhythm.
3. Research the history of slavery, focusing on its practice: in North America, in your state, in your town, or in your family. Report on your research, in prose or in poetry.
4. Make an object, mural, dance, or piece of music that expresses the Middle Passage as portrayed in "Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)."

"Wise I" and sections of "Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)," including excerpts from "So the King Sold the Farmer #39" and "Y the Link Will Not Always Be 'Missing' #40" from *TRANSBLUESENCY, The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995)*, reprinted by permission of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc. Copyright by Amiri Baraka.
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Coleman Barks

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"I like both translating Rumi and writing my own poems. But in one, I have to disappear—with Rumi. In the other, I have to get in the way—get my personality and my delights and my shame into the poem."

In 1976 Coleman Barks began translating the poems of Jelaluddin Rumi, a thirteenth-century Sufi mystic, a poet as famous in the Islamic world as Shakespeare is in the West. He has since become the primary translator bringing Rumi's poems into contemporary English. Born in Tennessee in 1937, he now lives in Athens, Georgia.

PHOTO: LYNN GILBERT

Where Everything Is Music

Don't worry about saving these songs!
And if one of our instruments breaks,
it doesn't matter.

We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp
should burn up, there will still be
hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint, and a spark.

This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge
of driftwood along the beach, wanting!

They derive
from a slow and powerful root
that we can't see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
and let the spirits fly in and out.

by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

How fully is the beauty
you love what you do?

Coleman Barks

Jars of Springwater

Jars of springwater are not enough
anymore. Take us down to the river!

The face of peace, the sun itself.
No more the slippery cloudlike moon.

Give us one clear morning after another
and the one whose work remains unfinished,

who *is* our work as we diminish, idle,
though occupied, empty, and open.

by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

from *New Year's Day Nap*

Fiesta Bowl on low.
My son lying here on the couch
on the "Dad" pillow he made for me
in the Seventh Grade. Now a sophomore
at Georgia Southern, driving back later today,
he sleeps with his white top hat over his face.

I'm a dancin' fool.

Twenty years ago, half the form
he sleeps within came out of nowhere
with a million micro-lemmings who all died but one
piercer of membrane, specially picked to start a brainmaking,
egg-drop soup, that stirred two sun and moon centers
for a new-painted sky in the tiniest
ballroom imaginable.

Now he's rousing, six feet long,
turning on his side. Now he's gone.

"New Year's Day Nap" from *GOURD SEED* by Coleman Barks, © 1993 by Coleman Barks. Used by arrangement with Maypop Books.
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"Jars of Spring Water" from *The Glance: Rumi's Songs of Soul Meeting* by Coleman Barks, translation and introduction, translation © 1999 by Coleman Barks. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

QUESTIONS

1. What qualities of "Jars of Springwater" suggest that its translator was successful in disappearing?
2. What qualities of the passage from "New Year's Day Nap" suggest that Coleman Barks was successful in getting his personality, delights, and shame into the poem?
3. Why do we *fall* "into the place / where everything is music"? Why don't we climb up to that place?

ACTIVITIES

1. Translate something from another language or from another medium of expression and concentrate on trying to disappear from the process of translation.
2. Write something or make something—a picture, a dance, a sculpture—in which you deliberately let yourself "get in the way."
3. In the program Coleman Barks says, "When you're in a place where music is, you can say things over and over and over." With music as a background, say something over and over, as the music invites. With others, let each person repeat his or her own language to the same music. Discuss what you learn about the rhythm of words.
4. Research the life and work of Jelaluddin Rumi and Sufi spiritual traditions. Report on your research or create a display (visual or aural) that allows others to experience some part of what you learned.

Lorna Dee Cervantes

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"When you grow up as I did—a Chican-India in a barrio, in a Mexican neighborhood in California, welfare class—you're not expected to speak. You're ignored. You're something in the periphery, emptying garbage cans or washing plates. You're not expected to speak, much less write."

Poet's Progress

for Sandra Cisneros

I haven't been
much of anywhere,
books my only voyage,
crossed no bodies
of water, seen anything
other than trees change,
birds take shape—like the rare
Bee Hummingbird that once hovered
over the promise of salsa
in my garden: a fur feathered
vision from Cuba in Boulder,
a wetback, stowaway, refugee,
farther from home than me.
Now, snow spatters its foreign
starch across the lawn gone
crisp with freeze. I know
nothing tropical survives
long in this season. I pull
the last leeks from the frozen
earth, smell their slender
tubercular lives, stand
in the sleet whiteout
of December: roots
draw in, threads of relatives
expand while solitude, the core,
that slick-headed fist of self, is
cool as my dog's nose and pungent
with resistance. Now when
the red-bellied woodpecker
calls his response to a California
owl, now, when the wound
transformer in the womb
slackens, and I wait
for potential: all
the lives I have
yet to name,
all my life
I have willed into being
alive and brittle with the icy
past. And it's enough now,
listening, counting the unknown
arachnids and hormigas
who share my love of less
sweeping. For this is what
I wanted, come to, left
alone with anything
but the girlhood horrors,
the touching, the hungry
leaden meltdown of the hours.
Or the future—a round negation,
black suction of the heart's
conception. *Save me*
from a stupid life! I prayed.
Leave me anything but
a stupid life.
And that's poetry.

"Poet's Progress" by Lorna Dee Cervantes, © 1997 by Lorna Dee Cervantes. Reprinted by permission of Lorna Dee Cervantes.

Born in San Francisco's Mission district of Native American and Mexican ancestry, Lorna Dee Cervantes discovered Shakespeare and the English Romantic poets in the houses her mother cleaned. As an adult, she has worked to put into language the once-wordless histories of Mexican Americans and especially Chican-Indias. She teaches at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

PHOTO: LYNN SAVELL

QUESTIONS

1. In "Poet's Progress" Lorna Dee Cervantes describes the course of her life as a poet. Where has she been? Where is she going?
2. What do the animals and plants in "Poet's Progress" tell us about the poet at the center of the poem?
3. According to "Poet's Progress," what is poetry? What is *"a stupid life"*?
4. What effects does the poet achieve by describing a Bee Hummingbird as "a wetback, stowaway, refugee"?

ACTIVITIES

1. Keep a journal of your encounters with animals and plants, of all sorts. Note how these encounters stimulate or reflect your feelings and ideas.
2. Write your own "Poet's Progress" about yourself or a poet you admire.
3. Create a bulletin board entitled "And that's poetry." Let everyone contribute something—a drawing, a photograph, a phrase, a poem, etc.—until it is entirely covered.

What do you risk in praying for *"anything but / a stupid life"*?

Deborah Garrison

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"I need to feel that the language in my poems is alive, in the sense of talking on the phone to a friend, sharing gossip."

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1965, Deborah Garrison joined the editorial staff of *The New Yorker* magazine after graduating from Brown University. The poems in her first collection, *A Working Girl Can't Win,* juxtapose our working and personal realities with honesty and humor. She lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

PHOTO: LYNN SAVILLE

Please Fire Me

Here comes another alpha male,
and all the other alphas
are snorting and pawing,
kicking up puffs of acrid dust

while the silly little hens
clatter back and forth
on quivering claws and raise
a titter about the fuss.

Here comes another alpha male—
a man's man, a dealmaker,
holds tanks of liquor,
charms them pantsless at lunch:

I've never been sicker.
Do I have to stare into his eyes
and sympathize? If I want my job
I do. Well I think I'm through

with the working world,
through with warming eggs
and being Zenlike in my detachment
from all things Ego.

I'd like to go
somewhere else entirely,
and I don't mean
Europe.

Father, R.I.P., Sums Me Up at Twenty-Three

She has no head for politics,
craves good jewelry, trusts too readily,

marries too early. Then
one by one she sends away her friends

and stands apart, smug sapphire,
her answer to everything a slender

zero, a silent shrug—and every day
still hears me say she'll never be pretty.

Instead she reads novels, instead her belt
matches her shoes. She is master

of the condolence letter, and knows
how to please a man with her mouth:

Good. Nose too large, eyes too closely set,
hair not glorious blonde, not her mother's red,

nor the glossy black her younger sister has,
the little raven I loved best.

"Please Fire Me" and "Father, R.I.P., Sums Me Up at Twenty-Three" from *A Working Girl Can't Win* by Deborah Garrison, © 1998 by Deborah Garrison. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

What makes you want "to go / somewhere else entirely"?

QUESTIONS

1. In "Please Fire Me," the poet talks about people as if they were particular kinds of animals. What does her choice of animals suggest about her attitude toward her situation? About her attitude toward herself?
2. What might have led Deborah Garrison to write "Father, R.I.P. . . ."? Explain why you would or would not write such a poem.

ACTIVITIES

1. Based on what Deborah Garrison describes in her poem "Please Fire Me," write new "rules for the workplace" or "rules for the world."
2. Suppose you were Deborah Garrison's boss or coworker. What would you do after reading "Please Fire Me"? Describe or role-play the conversation you would have with her.

Lucille Clifton

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"What they call you is one thing.
What you answer to is something else."

Self-taught, Lucille Clifton uses plain language to explore life's complexities and to affirm the spirit's endurance. Recently named a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she has served on faculties of universities across the country and is currently Distinguished Professor of Humanities at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

PHOTO: JOHN SAVILLE

adam thinking

she
stolen from my bone
is it any wonder
i hunger to tunnel back
inside desperate
to reconnect the rib and clay
and to be whole again

some need is in me
struggling to roar through my
mouth into a name
this creation is so fierce
i would rather have been born

eve thinking

it is wild country here
brothers and sisters coupling
claw and wing
groping one another

i wait
while the clay two-foot
rumbles in his chest
searching for language to

call me
but he is slow
tonight as he sleeps
i will whisper into his mouth
our names

Who have you turned yourself from, and toward, at once?

Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

oh absalom my son my son

even as i turned myself from you
i longed to hold you oh
my wild haired son

running in the wilderness away
from me from us
into a thicket you could not foresee

if you had stayed
i feared you would kill me
if you left i feared you would die

oh my son
my son
what does the Lord require

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"oh absalom my son my son," © 1996 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted from *THE TERRIBLE STORIES* with the permission of BOA Editions, Ltd.

QUESTIONS

1. In "won't you celebrate with me," Lucille Clifton says she had "no model" when she was growing up. How, then, did she become who she is?

2. Lucille Clifton uses biblical titles in three of these poems—"adam thinking," "eve thinking," and "oh absalom my son my son." Create alternative titles for these poems. What would you gain or lose by eliminating the biblical allusions?

3. Listen to the words Lucille Clifton emphasizes when she reads "adam thinking" and "eve thinking." How does your listening experience differ from your reading experience?

ACTIVITIES

1. Choose something about yourself that you would like others to celebrate with you. Create an invitation in words or pictures that expresses what it is you're celebrating and why.

2. Do research in the library to find out more about who Absalom was and what the name has come to mean in modern times. If there is an "Absalom" in your life or in the life of someone you know, think of what you would like to say to him or her. Express yourself in any medium you like.

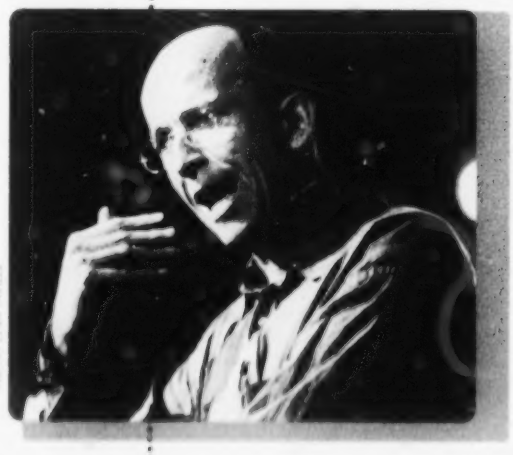
3. Choose two figures from history, mythology, fiction, movies, or television who have a relationship with each other. What secret or surprising things might each think about the other? Develop your own scenario any way you like—for example, in poetry, as a cartoon or comic strip, photo essay, two monologues, a dialogue, or pantomime.

Mark Doty

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"The poet's craft—love of the sheer physical pleasures of language: its sonics, its textures, its rhythms—is an enormous ally."

Born in 1953 in Maryville, Tennessee, Mark Doty explores our preoccupation with the past and the future and encourages us to live more in the present. Central to his work are animals and his concern for the need to cope nobly and gracefully with what is beyond our control. He teaches at the University of Houston.



New Dog

Jimi and Tony
can't keep Dino,
their cocker spaniel;
Tony's too sick,
the daily walks
more pressure
than pleasure,
one more obligation
that can't be met.

And though we already
have a dog, Wally
wants to adopt,
wants something small
and golden to sleep
next to him and
lick his face.
He's paralyzed now
from the waist down,

whatever's ruining him
moving upward, and
we don't know
how much longer
he'll be able to pet
a dog. How many men
want another attachment,
just as they're
leaving the world?

Wally sits up nights
and says, *I'd like*
some lizards, a talking bird,
some fish. A little rat.

So after I drive
to Jimi and Tony's
in the Village and they
meet me at the door and say,
We can't go through with it,

we can't give up our dog.
I drive to the shelter
—just to look—and there
is Beau: bounding and
practically boundless,
one brass concatenation
of tongue and tail,
unmediated energy,
too big, wild,

perfect. He not only
licks Wally's face
but bathes every
irreplaceable inch
of his head, and though
Wally can no longer
feed himself he can lift
his hand, and bring it
to rest on the rough gilt

flanks when they are,
for a moment, still.
I have never seen a touch
so deliberate.
It isn't about grasping;
the hand itself seems
almost blurred now,
softened, though
tentative only

because so much will
must be summoned,
such attention brought
to the work—which is all
he is now, this gesture
toward the restless splendor,
the unruly, the golden,
the animal, the new.

Golden Retrievals

Fetch? Balls and sticks capture my attention
seconds at a time. Catch? I don't think so.
Bunny, tumbling leaf, a squirrel who's—oh
joy—actually scared. Sniff the wind, then

I'm off again: muck, pond, ditch, residue
of any thrillingly dead thing. And you?
Either you're sunk in the past, half our walk,
thinking of what you can never bring back,

or else you're off in some fog concerning
—tomorrow, is that what you call it? My work:
to unsnare time's warp (and woof!), retrieving,
my haze-headed friend, you. This shining bark,

a Zen master's bronzy gong, calls you here,
entirely, now: bow-wow, bow-wow, bow-wow.

What calls you here, entirely, now?

Mark Doty

from Messiah (Christmas Portions)

Who'd have thought
they'd be so good? *Every valley,*
proclaims the solo tenor,
(a sleek blonde

I've seen somewhere before
—the liquor store?) *shall be exalted,*
and in his handsome mouth the word
is lifted and opened

into more syllables
than we could count, central *ah*
dilated in a baroque melisma,
liquefied; the pour

of voice seems
to *make* the unplaned landscape
the text predicts the Lord
will heighten and tame.

This music
demonstrates what it claims:
glory shall be revealed. If art's
acceptable evidence,

mustn't what lies
behind the world be at least
as beautiful as the human voice?
The tenors lack confidence,

and the soloists,
half of them anyway, don't
have the strength to found
the mighty kingdoms

these passages propose
—but the chorus, all together,
equals my burning clouds,
and seems itself to burn,

commingled powers
deeded to a larger, centering claim.
These aren't anyone we know;
choiring dissolves

familiarity in an up-
pouring rush which will not
rest, will not, for a moment,
be still.

Aren't we enlarged
by the scale of what we're able
to desire? Everything,
the choir insists,

might flame;
inside these wrappings
burns another, brighter life,
quickened, now,

by song: hear how
it cascades, in overlapping,
lapidary waves of praise? Still time.
Still time to change.

"Messiah (Christmas Portions)" and "Golden Retrievals" from *SWEET MACHINE* by Mark Doty. © 1998 by Mark Doty. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
"New Dog" from *ATLANTIS* by Mark Doty. © 1995 by Mark Doty. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

QUESTIONS

1. In "Messiah (Christmas Portions)," Mark Doty says, "Who'd have thought / they'd be so good?" Describe an event in which you or someone you know was suddenly or beautifully transformed—such as in a concert, play, sports event, or dance. Were you surprised? Why? What did you learn about yourself or the other person?

2. Doty writes, "Aren't we enlarged / by the scale of what we're able / to desire?" List five things you most desire. List five things someone you know well desires. How do our desires define us—make us seem smaller or larger?

3. Something that at first seemed crazy—writing a poem from a dog's point of view—eventually produced "Golden Retrievals." Describe something that you at first thought was crazy but that turned out to have a surprising result.

ACTIVITIES

1. Choose an animal who could dictate something to you. What would the animal say? Include your observations of some of the animal's characteristics as well as its words. What do you think you might learn from the animal?

2. Choose a moment in time—right now or some time in the past. Pretend you've taken a three-dimensional photo of the moment. Describe as much as you can about the moment, including physical descriptions, feelings, and ideas. What would you change to make the moment more vivid?

3. Both Mark and Jimi experienced their partner's illness due to AIDS. Their dogs, Beau and Dino, helped the ill partners feel better. Create a poster that helps people become aware of AIDS and that suggests possible things they can do to help people who have this disease.

Jane Hirshfield

"I feel like I am in the service of the poem. The poem isn't something I make. The poem is something I serve."

PHOTO: LYNN SAVILLE

Born in New York City and educated at Princeton, Jane Hirshfield has lived in Northern California for the past twenty-five years. A student of Zen and a great woman poet of spirituality, love, and the natural world, she writes with plain reverence of the heart and mind, broadening our awareness of the rich currents of our daily life.

The Poet

She is working now, in a room
not unlike this one,
the one where I write, or you read.
Her table is covered with paper.
The light of the lamp would be
tempered by a shade, where the bulb's
single harshness might dissolve,
but it is not, she has taken it off.
Her poems? I will never know them,
though they are the ones I most need.
Even the alphabet she writes in
I cannot decipher. Her chair—
Let us imagine whether it is leather
or canvas, vinyl or wicker. Let her
have a chair, her shadeless lamp,
the table. Let one or two she loves
be in the next room. Let the door
be closed, the sleeping ones healthy.
Let her have time, and silence,
enough paper to make mistakes and go on.

Which animals have signaled unknown openings in your life?

"The Poet" from *THE LIVES OF THE HEART* by Jane Hirshfield, © 1997 by Jane Hirshfield. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
"The Envoy" © 1998 by Jane Hirshfield first appeared in the magazine *Blue Sofa* and also can be found in *THE BEST AMERICAN POETRY*, edited by Robert Bly, published by Scribners, 1999. Used by permission of the author.

The Envoy

One day in that room, a small rat.
Two days later, a snake.

Who, seeing me enter,
whipped the long stripe of his
body under the bed,
then curled like a docile house-pet.

I don't know how either came or left.
Later, the flashlight found nothing.

For a year I watched
as something—terror? happiness? grief?—
entered and then left my body.

Not knowing how it came in,
Not knowing how it went out.

It hung where words could not reach it.
It slept where light could not go.
Its scent was neither snake nor rat,
neither sensualist nor ascetic.

There are openings in our lives
of which we know nothing.

Through them
the belled herds travel at will,
long-legged and thirsty, covered with foreign dust.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the poet in "The Poet" prefers a shadeless lamp?
2. What else, besides "enough paper to make mistakes and go on," does the person writing about the poet in "The Poet" want her to have? Why?
3. What is an "envoy"? How does the small rat or snake of "The Envoy" open the way for the "belled" herds? Why are these herds "long-legged," "thirsty," and "covered with foreign dust"?

ACTIVITIES

1. With a group, design and arrange, as if for the stage, the scene described in "The Poet." Take turns directing someone playing the poet. Take turns playing the poet. During rehearsals, decide how long each version of the play will be. Introduce each performance with a reading of the poem.
2. Create a mural presenting the experiences described in "The Envoy." Do this alone or with a group. If you do this with a group, consult first on the images everyone agrees should be part of the mural. Discuss how these images will relate to each other.

Paul Muldoon

"Poetry begins with little glimmers—the sense that there might be an interaction between two things, two often quite unlike things that come together in a metaphor or an image."

Symposium

You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it hold
its nose to the grindstone and hunt with the hounds.
Every dog has a stitch in time. Two heads? You've been
sold
one good turn. One good turn deserves a bird in the hand.

A bird in the hand is better than no bread.
To have your cake is to pay Paul.
Make hay while you can still hit the nail on the head.
For want of a nail the sky might fall.

People in glass houses can't see the wood
for the new broom. Rome wasn't built between two stools.
Empty vessels wait for no man.

A hair of the dog is a friend indeed.
There's no fool like the fool
who's shot his bolt. There's no smoke after the horse is
gone.

What story has made the context of its telling unforgettable to you?

"Symposium" from *Hay* by Paul Muldoon, © 1998 by Paul Muldoon.
Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.
"The Sightseers" from *Quoof* by Paul Muldoon, © 1983 by Paul Muldoon.
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Born in Northern Ireland in 1951, Paul Muldoon was a radio and television producer with the BBC before moving to the United States in the late 1980s. His passion for exact description grows from his awareness that what is apparent often contains a deeper, stranger story. He currently teaches at Princeton University and was recently elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

PHOTO: JANE REGAN

The Sightseers

My father and mother, my brother and sister
and I, with uncle Pat, our dour best-loved uncle,
had set out that Sunday afternoon in July
in his broken-down Ford

not to visit some graveyard—one died of shingles,
one of fever, another's knees turned to jelly—
but the brand-new roundabout at Ballygawley,
the first in mid-Ulster.

Uncle Pat was telling us how the B-Specials
had stopped him one night somewhere near Ballygawley
and smashed his bicycle

and made him sing the Sash and curse the Pope of Rome.
They held a pistol so hard against his forehead
there was still the mark of an O when he got home.

QUESTIONS

1. Look up the definition of "symposium." How is Muldoon's poem similar to and different from the definition? Explain why you think the title works or doesn't work.
2. Based on the setting of "The Sightseers," what are the "B-Specials," and why did they stop Uncle Pat and terrorize him? Why do you think Muldoon juxtaposed the story of the roundabout with Uncle Pat's story of brutality? What does an "o" have to do with it? What are some other stories of recurring violence?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create your own verbal "symposium," using parts of well-known aphorisms, proverbs, or folk sayings. Create your own visual "symposium," using widely different kinds of images from magazines, newspapers, and photographs.
2. After listening to Paul Muldoon read "The Sightseers," write about a family event you experienced and describe it in relation to a place in your neighborhood or city.

Stanley Kunitz

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"The remarkable thing that I feel is that despite the aging of the body—despite those aches and pains and all the rest of what happens to one at this stage of a life—the spirit remains young. It's the same spirit I remember living with during my childhood."

PHOTO: JOSE VILLA

Stanley Kunitz welcomed his ninetieth year in 1995 with a new collection of luminous, life-affirming poems titled *Passing Through*. Exceptionally generous and encouraging to younger artists, Stanley Kunitz has received nearly every honor our culture can bestow upon a poet. He and his wife summer in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and winter in New York City.

The Portrait

My mother never forgave my father
for killing himself,
especially at such an awkward time
and in a public park,
that spring
when I was waiting to be born.
She locked his name
in her deepest cabinet
and would not let him out,
though I could hear him thumping.
When I came down from the attic
with the pastel portrait in my hand
of a long-lipped stranger
with a brave moustache
and deep brown level eyes,
she ripped it into shreds
without a single word
and slapped me hard.
In my sixty-fourth year
I can feel my cheek
still burning.

The Round

Light splashed this morning
on the shell-pink anemones
swaying on their tall stems;
down blue-spiked veronica
light flowed in rivulets
over the humps of the honeybees;
this morning I saw light kiss
the silk of the roses
in their second flowering,
my late bloomers
flushed with their brandy.
A curious gladness shook me.

So I have shut the doors of my house,
so I have trudged downstairs to my cell,
so I am sitting in semi-dark
hunched over my desk
with nothing for a view
to tempt me
but a bloated compost heap,
steamy old stinkpile,
under my window;
and I pick my notebook up
and I start to read aloud
the still-wet words I scribbled
on the blotted page:
"Light splashed . . ."

I can scarcely wait till tomorrow
when a new life begins for me,
as it does each day,
as it does each day.

When did you last notice that "Light splashed this morning"?

Stanley Kunitz

Halley's Comet

Miss Murphy in first grade
wrote its name in chalk
across the board and told us
it was roaring down the stormtracks
of the Milky Way at frightful speed
and if it wandered off its course
and smashed into the earth
there'd be no school tomorrow.
A red-bearded preacher from the hills
with a wild look in his eyes
stood in the public square
at the playground's edge
proclaiming he was sent by God
to save every one of us,
even the little children.
"Repent, ye sinners!" he shouted,
waving his hand-lettered sign.
At supper I felt sad to think
that it was probably
the last meal I'd share
with my mother and my sisters;
but I felt excited too
and scarcely touched my plate.
So mother scolded me
and sent me early to my room.
The whole family's asleep
except for me. They never heard me steal
into the stairwell hall and climb
the ladder to the fresh night air.

Look for me, Father, on the roof
of the red brick building
at the foot of Green Street—
that's where we live, you know, on the top floor.
I'm the boy in the white flannel gown
sprawled on this coarse gravel bed
searching the starry sky,
waiting for the world to end.

"The Round" © 1985 by Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet" © 1995 by Stanley Kunitz, "The Portrait" © 1971 by Stanley Kunitz, from *PASSING THROUGH: The Later Poems New and Selected by Stanley Kunitz*. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the poet in "The Round" refer to his room as a "cell"? Why do you think he arranged his room downstairs, with his desk offering nothing for a view except "a bloated compost heap"?
2. Why doesn't "The Round" start in the poet's "cell"?
3. How does the poet of "The Round" help a new life to begin for himself each day?
4. Both "Halley's Comet" and "The Portrait" recall childhood memories. Which do you think is the earlier memory? Which the more private memory? Which the more disturbing memory?

ACTIVITIES

1. Stanley Kunitz wrote "Halley's Comet" on the occasion of the comet's second pass by our planet during his lifetime. Find out what you can about Halley's Comet, especially the popular response to those appearances. Write ten lines that connect a major natural event that you have experienced or know about with something in your life.
2. Arrange a choral reading of "The Round" as a musical "round." Assign each of its three stanzas to a different group of readers. Let each group practice separately, repeating the stanza assigned. Then combine the groups by experimenting with ways of layering the stanzas, while keeping them all going at once.

Kurtis Lamkin

FOOLING WITH WORDS
WITH BILL MOYERS

"The kora talks, for real. That's why when Africans were brought here all African instruments were banned from the United States—because they could talk."

Kurtis Lamkin accompanies his oral praise poems on the kora, a twenty-one-stringed West African harp-lute used by Djelis (griots, troubadours). His poems explore the counterpoint between the fixed meaning of words and the raw sounds that emerge from and dissolve into feeling. A native of Philadelphia, he lives with his family in Charleston, South Carolina.

PHOTO: DAN SWELL

jump mama

pretty summer day
grammama sittin on her porch
easy
rockin her grandbaby in her wide lap
ol men sittin in their lincoln
tastin and talkin and talkin and tastin
young boys on the corner
milkin a yak yak wild hands baggy pants
young girls halfway up the block
jumpin that double dutch
singin their song
kenny kana paula
be on time
cause school begins
at a quarter to nine
jump one two three and aaaaaaah. . .

round the corner comes
this young woman
draggin herself heavy home from work
she sees the young boys
sees the old men
but when she sees the girls she just starts smilin
she says let me get a little bit of that
they say you can't jump
you too old

why they say that
o, why they say that

she says tanya you hold my work bag
chaniqua come over here girl i want you to hold my handbag
josie could you hold my grocery bag
please
kebè take my purse
she starts bobbin her head, jackin her arms
tryin to catch the rhythm of the ropes
and when she jumps inside those turning loops
the girls crowd her sing their song
kenny kana paula
be on time
cause school begins
at a quarter to nine
jump one two three and
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah
she jumps on one leg—*aaaaah*
she dances sassy saucy—*aaaaah*
jump for the girls mama
jump for the stars mama
jump for the young boys sayin
jump mama! jump mama!
jump for the old woman sayin—aww, go head baby

and what the young girls say
what the young girls say
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah

How do you "shake the snake / that coils around our humble lives"?

Kurtis Lamkin

the million man march

we do right
we do wrong
we do time overtime
we do what it takes to shake the snake
that coils around our humble lives
whatever we can do
we do

we do lunch
we do meetings
we do fundraisers we do marches
we send a million men
to carry peace to the heart of a cold cold nation
some say we don't count
we do
we always do

suppose there's a god
who thinks that we are god
who loves us so deeply she followed us here
we work so hard every trick looks like a miracle
and then we name the trickster god
if there is a god
who thinks that we are god
do we hear her prayer
do we?

in the deep dark hour
when we are all alone
what is that sound what is that prayer
what is this faith
we do

"jump mama" by Kurtis Lamkin, © 1997 by Kurtis Lamkin; "the million man march" by Kurtis Lamkin, © 1997 by Kurtis Lamkin. Reprinted by permission of Kurtis Lamkin.

QUESTIONS

1. Kurtis Lamkin's performances often vary considerably from the printed texts of his poems. How might the context of each performance figure in these variations? Would you regard the printed or the performed version as primary? Why?

2. If the kora can talk, what do you hear it saying in Kurtis Lamkin's performance of "the million man march"?

3. In what ways could our nation be seen as "a cold cold nation"?

4. In what ways does "jump mama" honor the spirit of community?

ACTIVITIES

1. Review the performances of Coleman Barks, Amiri Baraka, and Kurtis Lamkin, paying attention to how each uses a rhythmic, musical background. Apply what you have learned as you perform poems—by these poets or by others—over a rhythmic, musical background.

2. With a group of others, research the Million Man March. Why did it occur? Why was it controversial? How did others who attended respond to it? Compare your findings to Kurtis Lamkin's poem. Discuss your findings with your research group.

3. Find an instrument that "talks, for real" to you, then read a poem (perhaps one of your own) to its sound.

4. Use a childhood rhyme or game to start a poem.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"I started writing when I was about nine. I loved the idea of going into a space where there is language which is yours, which is completely private, and which you can do anything with—you can curse someone you cannot curse otherwise, you can create a space of beauty when all around you there is poverty and deprivation. The act of writing poems is the act that has centered me all my life."

Shirley Geok-lin Lim, born in the historic British colony of Malacca, writes from her Chinese-Malaysian heritage and the landscape of the United States, of which she is now a citizen. Her books of poetry have received the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the American Book Award. She is professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is currently on leave as Chair Professor of English at the University of Hong Kong.

Riding into California

If you come to a land with no ancestors
to bless you, you have to be your own
ancestor. The veterans in the mobile home
park don't want to be there. It isn't easy.
Oil rigs litter the land like giant frozen birds.
Ghosts welcome us to a new life, and
an immigrant without home ghosts
cannot believe the land is real. So you're
grateful for familiarity, and Bruce Lee
becomes your hero. Coming into Fullerton,
everyone waiting at the station is white.
The good thing about being Chinese on Amtrack
is no one sits next to you. The bad thing is
you sit alone all the way to Irvine.

What ghosts have welcomed you to a new life?

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

Pantoun for Chinese Women

"At present, the phenomena of butchering, drowning and leaving to die female infants have been very serious." (*The People's Daily*, Peking, March 3rd, 1983)

They say a child with two mouths is no good.
In the slippery wet, a hollow space,
Smooth, gumming, echoing wide for food.
No wonder my man is not here at his place.

In the slippery wet, a hollow space,
A slit narrowly sheathed within its hood.
No wonder my man is not here at his place:
He is digging for the dragon jar of soot.

That slit narrowly sheathed within its hood!
His mother, squatting, coughs by the fire's blaze
While he digs for the dragon jar of soot.
We had saved ashes for a hundred days.

His mother, squatting, coughs by the fire's blaze.
The child kicks against me mewing like a flute.
We had saved ashes for a hundred days.
Knowing, if the time came, that we would.

The child kicks against me crying like a flute
Through its two weak mouths. His mother prays
Knowing when the time comes that we would,
For broken clay is never set in glaze.

Through her two weak mouths his mother prays.
She will not pluck the rooster nor serve its blood,
For broken clay is never set in glaze:
Women are made of river sand and wood.

She will not pluck the rooster nor serve its blood.
My husband frowns, pretending in his haste
Women are made of river sand and wood.
Milk soaks the bedding. I cannot bear the waste.

My husband frowns, pretending in his haste.
Oh clean the girl, dress her in ashy soot!
Milks soaks our bedding, I cannot bear the waste.
They say a child with two mouths is no good.

"Pantoun for Chinese Women" by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, © 1982, 1983 by Shirley Geok-lin Lim. Reprinted by permission of Shirley Geok-lin Lim.
"Riding into California" from *What the Fortune Teller Didn't Say* by Shirley Geok-lin Lim, © 1998 by Shirley Geok-lin Lim. Reprinted by permission of West End Press.

QUESTIONS

1. Shirley Geok-lin Lim writes that "you have to be your own ancestor," while Lucille Clifton writes that she grew up with "no model." How are these two women's statements and the experiences they describe similar? Different?

2. Study Shirley Geok-lin Lim's pantoun and then explain how to write one. Why do you think Shirley Geok-lin Lim chose this form to talk about Chinese women? What happens when you hear a line the second time? For what subject or group would you like to write a pantoun?

3. How does the epigraph from the newspaper aid or distract you in your appreciation of "Pantoun for Chinese Women"?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a work for a group that suffers oppression. Your work might be a poem (such as a pantoun), a dance, a film, a photo essay, a song, or any other form of expression. Explain whom the work is for and why you made it.

2. Suppose you've come to a country or planet where no one like you has been before. "You have to be your own ancestor," as Shirley Geok-lin Lim says. Write a story or narrative poem describing how you make yourself feel at home. Describe some of the things that are challenging and some of the things that are enjoyable.

Sharon Olds

"There is something exciting to me about writing about something that I haven't written about before and that maybe I haven't read a lot of poems about. . . . When I grew up there were so few poems about women from a woman's point of view, so few poems about children from a child's point of view."

The Clasp

She was four, he was one, it was raining, we had colds,
we had been in the apartment two weeks straight,
I grabbed her to keep her from shoving him over on his
face, again, and when I had her wrist
in my grasp I compressed it, fiercely, for a couple
of seconds, to make an impression on her,
to hurt her, our beloved firstborn, I even almost
savored the stinging sensation of the squeezing,
the expression, into her, of my anger,
"*Never, never, again,*" the righteous
chant accompanying the clasp. It happened very
fast—grab, crush, crush,
crush, release—and at the first extra
force, she swung her head, as if checking
who this was, and looked at me,
and saw me—yes, this was her mom,
her mom was doing this. Her dark,
deeply open eyes took me
in, she knew me, in the shock of the moment
she learned me. This was her mother, one of the
two whom she most loved, the two
who loved her most, near the source of love
was this.

"The Clasp" (copyright © Sharon Olds) first appeared in *The American Poetry Review*.

Born in San Francisco in 1942, Sharon Olds was raised as a "hellfire Calvinist" in Berkeley, California. Her work has been praised for its courage, emotional power, and extraordinary physicality. She teaches in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at New York University and is the State Poet of New York from 1998-2000.

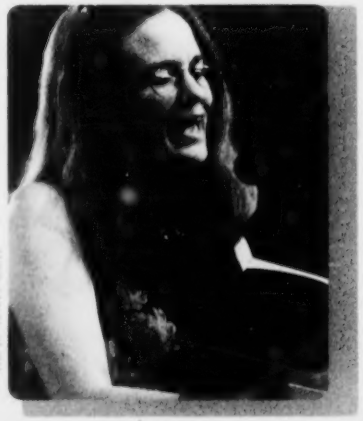

PHOTO: JESS GOLD

QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the family presented in the "The Clasp"? How is the daughter like or unlike her mother?
2. How does the information provided in the first two lines of "The Clasp" affect your response to the central event in the poem? What about the information provided in the third and fourth lines?
3. How does "The Clasp" introduce the poem differently from, say, "The Grab"?

ACTIVITIES

1. With one or two others, read "The Clasp" aloud, listening to what different readers emphasize and paying particular attention to the contrast between how each naturally reads the "righteous chant" and the lines that follow it.
2. With a small group, act out Sharon Olds's "The Clasp" and Stanley Kunitz's "The Portrait." Discuss which was more challenging to act out. Discuss which was more shocking to experience.

What "in the shock of the moment" have you seen "near the source of love"?

Poem Subjects and Themes

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

Poems from FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS can be mixed and matched according to the following subjects and themes—or you can create your own connections. Here are a few of the possibilities.

POEMS OF CHILDHOOD

Paul Muldoon, "The Sightseers"
Kurtis Lamkin, "jump mama"
Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet"
Stanley Kunitz, "The Portrait"

POEMS OF ANIMALS

Mark Doty, "New Dog"
Mark Doty, "Golden Retrievals"
Jane Hirshfield, "The Envoy"
Deborah Garrison, "Please Fire Me"
Robert Pinsky, "The Want Bone"

POEMS OF FAMILY LIFE

Lucille Clifton, "oh absalom my son my son"
Deborah Garrison, "Father, R.I.P., Sums Me Up at Twenty-Three"
Paul Muldoon, "The Sightseers"
Robert Pinsky, "To Television"
Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet"
Stanley Kunitz, "The Portrait"
Sharon Olds, "The Clasp"

POEMS OF SURVIVAL

Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Riding into California"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise I"
Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poet's Progress"
Stanley Kunitz, "The Round"
Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet"
Robert Pinsky, "The Want Bone"
Mark Doty, "New Dog"

POEMS OF COMMUNITY

Mark Doty, "Messiah (Christmas Portions)"
Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet"
Kurtis Lamkin, "jump mama"

POEMS OF WORK

Deborah Garrison, "Please Fire Me"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Jars of Springwater"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Today, like every other day"
Stanley Kunitz, "The Round"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)"

POEMS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me"
Marge Piercy, "The chuppah"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Pantoun for Chinese Women"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Riding into California"
Paul Muldoon, "The Sightseers"
Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poet's Progress"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise I"
Kurtis Lamkin, "the million man march"

POEMS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me"
Marge Piercy, "What are big girls made of?"
Deborah Garrison, "Please Fire Me"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Pantoun for Chinese Women"
Jane Hirshfield, "The Poet"

POEMS OF POLITICS AND HISTORY

Paul Muldoon, "The Sightseers"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Pantoun for Chinese Women"
Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Riding into California"
Amiri Baraka, "Monday in B Flat"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise, Why's, Y'z (Africa Section)"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise I"
Kurtis Lamkin, "the million man march"

POEMS OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Mark Doty, "Messiah (Christmas Portions)"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Where Everything Is Music"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Today, like every other day"
Kurtis Lamkin, "jump mama"
Amiri Baraka, "Wise I"

POEMS OF WORDPLAY

Paul Muldoon, "Symposium"
Robert Pinsky, "ABC"
Mark Doty, "Golden Retrievals"

POEMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Mark Doty, "Golden Retrievals"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Jars of Springwater"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Where Everything Is Music"

POEMS OF POETS AND POETRY

Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Today, like every other day"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Where Everything is Music"
Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poet's Progress"
Jane Hirshfield, "The Poet"
Jane Hirshfield, "The Envoy"
Stanley Kunitz, "The Round"
Robert Pinsky, "If You Could Write One Great Poem"

POEMS OF FAITH AND SKEPTICISM

Lucille Clifton, "oh absalom my son my son"
Mark Doty, "Messiah (Christmas Portions)"
Stanley Kunitz, "Halley's Comet"
Amiri Baraka, "Monday in B Flat"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Where Everything Is Music"
Coleman Barks/Rumi, "Today, like every other day"
Kurtis Lamkin, "the million man march"

Marge Piercy

"When I first found poetry that spoke to me—a street kid from Detroit, from a poor family—it was validation that I wasn't crazy, wasn't bizarre, wasn't totally nutty. There were other people who felt the way I felt."

PHOTO: ANNE CHAPMAN

Marge Piercy was born in a working-class family in Detroit and attended the University of Michigan on scholarship. She is the author of fifteen volumes of poetry and sixteen novels, in genre as diverse as historical fiction, science fiction, contemporary thrillers, and family sagas. Her themes encompass social justice for men and women, nature and spirituality, especially the "lunar side" of Judaism.

The chuppah

The chuppah stands on four poles.
The home has its four corners.
The chuppah stands on four poles.
The marriage stands on four legs.
Four points loose the winds
that blow on the walls of the house,
the south wind that brings the warm rain,
the east wind that brings the cold rain,
the north wind that brings the cold sun
and the snow, the long west wind
bringing the weather off the far plains.

Here we live open to the seasons.
Here the winds caress and cuff us
contrary and fierce as bears.
Here the winds are caught and snarling
in the pines, a cat in a net clawing
breaking twigs to fight loose.
Here the winds brush our faces
soft in the morning as feathers
that float down from a dove's breast.

Here the moon sails up out of the ocean
dripping like a just washed apple.
Here the sun wakes us like a baby.
Therefore the chuppah has no sides.

It is not a box.
It is not a coffin.
It is not a dead end.
Therefore the chuppah has no walls.
We have made a home together
open to the weather of our time.
We are mills that turn in the winds of struggle
converting fierce energy into bread.

The canopy is the cloth of our table
where we share fruit and vegetables
of our labor, where our care for the earth
comes back and we take its body in ours.

The canopy is the cover of our bed
where our bodies open their portals wide,
where we eat and drink the blood
of our love, where the skin shines red
as a swallowed sunrise and we burn
in one furnace of joy molten as steel
and the dream is flesh and flower.

O my love O my love we dance
under the chuppah standing over us
like an animal on its four legs,
like a table on which we set our love
as a feast, like a tent
under which we work
not safe but no longer solitary
in the searing heat of our time.

"Why should we want to live inside ads?"

Marge Piercy

from What are big girls made of?

The construction of a woman:
a woman is not made of flesh
of bone and sinew
belly and breasts, elbows and liver and toe.
She is manufactured like a sports sedan.
She is retooled, refitted and redesigned
every decade.

...

Look at pictures in French fashion
magazines of the 18th century:
century of the ultimate lady
fantasy wrought of silk and corseting.
Paniers bring her hips out three feet
each way, while the waist is pinched
and the belly flattened under wood.
The breasts are stuffed up and out
offered like apples in a bowl.
The tiny foot is encased in a slipper
never meant for walking.
On top is a grandiose headache:
hair like a museum piece, daily
ornamented with ribbons, vases,
grottoes, mountains, frigates in full
sail, balloons, baboons, the fancy
of a hairdresser turned loose.
The hats were rococo wedding cakes
that would dim the Las Vegas strip.
Here is a woman forced into shape
rigid exoskeleton torturing flesh:
a woman made of pain.

How superior we are now: see the modern woman
thin as a blade of scissors.
She runs on a treadmill every morning,
fits herself into machines of weights
and pulleys to heave and grunt,
an image in her mind she can never
approximate, a body of rosy
glass that never wrinkles,
never grows, never fades. She
sits at the table closing her eyes to food
hungry, always hungry:
a woman made of pain.

...

If only we could like each other raw.
If only we could love ourselves
like healthy babies burbling in our arms.
If only we were not programmed and reprogrammed
to need what is sold us.
Why should we want to live inside ads?
Why should we want to scourge our softness
to straight lines like a Mondrian painting?
Why should we punish each other with scorn
as if to have a large ass
were worse than being greedy or mean?

When will women not be compelled
to view their bodies as science projects,
gardens to be weeded,
dogs to be trained?
When will a woman cease
to be made of pain?

QUESTIONS

1. A chuppah is a canopy held up by four people in a Jewish wedding. Tradition calls for the bride and groom to stand under the chuppah during the ceremony. How does Piercy use the chuppah as a symbol in her poem? Why do you think traditions and symbols are important to a culture?
2. Near the end of "What are big girls made of?" Marge Piercy writes, "If only we could like each other raw. / If only we could love ourselves / like healthy babies burbling in our arms." What messages do you think society gives teenagers about how they should look? What happens to people who take those messages too seriously?

ACTIVITIES

1. A chuppah is a physical object that has symbolic meanings. Choose a physical object you find interesting—it could be something unique to your culture, or it could be a personal item. Describe how that object has meaning in your experience or in someone else's experience.
2. Marge Piercy says, "Observing the contradictions of my mother's life taught me a lot about women's lives." What life have you observed closely? What has it taught you? In writing, dance, or illustration, express what you've learned.
3. Research a particular style of clothing or a particular idea about beauty in history or in other cultures. What do you think that style or idea implies about the way people thought of themselves? How was the style or idea different for men and for women? Share your findings in any format you like.

"The chuppah" from *THE ART OF BLESSING THE DAY* by Marge Piercy, © 1985, 1999 by Marge Piercy. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
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Robert Pinsky

FOOLING WITH WORDS WITH BILL MOYERS

"Poetry is the art of one human voice. Without denigrating art on a mass scale—I love my TV, my computer, and my VCR—there's a craving and a satisfaction available in an art that in its nature is on an individual scale."

The current U.S. Poet Laureate and the first to serve for more than two years, Robert Pinsky grew up in Long Branch, New Jersey. His Favorite Poem Archive will gather a database describing what poetry means to us, as a nation, at the close of the twentieth century. He teaches at Boston University.

PHOTO: LYNN SAVILLE

To Television

Not a "window on the world"
But as we call you,
A box a tube

Terrarium of dreams and wonders.
Coffer of shades, ordained
Cotillion of phosphors
Or liquid crystal

Homey miracle, tub
Of acquiescence, vein of defiance.
Your patron in the pantheon would be Hermes

Raster dance,
Quick one, little thief, escort
Of the dying and comfort of the sick,

In a blue glow my father and little sister sat
Snuggled in one chair watching you
Their wife and mother was sick in the head
I scorned you and them as I scorned so much

Now I like you best in a hotel room,
Maybe minutes
Before I have to face an audience: behind
The doors of the armoire, box
Within a box—Tom & Jerry, or also brilliant
And reassuring, Oprah Winfrey.

Thank you, for I watched, I watched
Sid Caesar speaking French and Japanese not
Through knowledge but imagination,
His quickness, and Thank you, I watched live
Jackie Robinson stealing

Home, the image—O strung shell—enduring
Fleeter than light like these words we
Remember in: they too are winged
At the helmet and ankles.

ABC

Any body can die, evidently. Few
Go happily, irradiating joy.

Knowledge, love. Most
Need oblivion, painkillers,
Quickest respite.

Sweet time unafflicted,
Various world:

X = your zenith.

What has television's quickness given to you? Taken from you?

Robert Pinsky

If You Could Write One Great Poem, What Would You Want It To Be About?

(Asked of four student poets at the Illinois Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired)

Fire: because it is quick, and can destroy.
Music: place where anger has its place.
Romantic Love—the cold or stupid ask why.
Sign: that it is a language, full of grace,

That it is visible, invisible, dark and clear,
That it is loud and noiseless and is contained
Inside a body and explodes in air
Out of a body to conquer from the mind.

The Want Bone

The tongue of the waves tolled in the earth's bell.
Blue rippled and soaked in the fire of blue.
The dried mouthbones of a shark in the hot swale
Gaped on nothing but sand on either side.

The bone tasted of nothing and smelled of nothing,
A scalded toothless harp, uncrushed, unstrung.
The joined arcs made the shape of birth and craving
And the welded-open shape kept mouthing O.

Ossified cords held the corners together
In groined spirals pleated like a summer dress.
But where was the limber grin, the gash of pleasure?
Infinitesimal mouths bore it away.

The beach scrubbed and etched and pickled it clean.
But O I love you it sings, my little my country
My food my parent my child I want you my own
My flower my fin my life my lightness my O.

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"If You Could Write One Great Poem, What Would You Want It To Be About?" from *THE FIGURED WHEEL* by Robert Pinsky, © 1996 by Robert Pinsky. Reprinted by permission of the Noonday Press.

QUESTIONS

1. The specific language describing Sid Caesar and Jackie Robinson in "To Television" gives us important information about each and develops our understanding of Hermes, "Quick one, little thief." According to this poem, what qualities link Caesar, Robinson, and Hermes?

2. Hermes—a Greek messenger god—is also described in "To Television" as "escort / Of the dying and comfort of the sick." How does television perform these functions in this poem?

3. The title "ABC" seems to imply an elementary, predictable experience. In what ways does the poem fulfill or evade this implication?

4. What value would you give to X in "X=your zenith"?

ACTIVITIES

1. Use the alphabet to write a series of stories, sketches, or poems of your own. In your first effort, let the sequence of the alphabet determine every third word. In your second, every other word. In your third, every word.

2. With a group, try different readings of "ABC." Make notes of what you notice in each reading. Discuss what your group could now offer to increase anyone's pleasure in hearing and speaking this poem.

3. Create your own list of metaphors for television or some other object or institution—radio, computer, automobile, shopping mall, school, etc.—that has both personal and social significance.

4. Draw the whole scene described in "To Television."